

Archives to Open 800,000-Page JFK

By Walter Pincus
Washington Post Staff Writer

Assassination Collection

Four days after the Nov. 22, 1963, assassination of President John F. Kennedy, the CIA sent a classified message to the White House and the FBI that raised the possibility that Fidel Castro's Cuban regime may have had some involvement with Lee Harvey Oswald's actions in Dallas.

The Nov. 26, 1963, CIA report quoted from an international telephone call that morning that was intercepted by intelligence agents in Mexico. During the call, Cuban President Osvaldo Dorticos in Havana asked his ambassador in Mexico City, Joaquin Hernandez Armas, whether questions had been raised by Mexican authorities about "money" being given to Oswald.

The intercepted conversation so convinced then-U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Thomas Mann that the Cubans may have been involved that he cabled Washington for authorization to arrange the arrest of a possible Mexican witness because "danger of her disappearance or murder may be immediate and great," according to another CIA document.

The next day, however, the CIA reported on another phone call between Dorticos and Hernandez Armas in which the Cuban president said his question about money "was referring as to whether [the Mexican authorities] had threatened [a Cuban consulate employee] so that she would make a statement that the consulate had given money to the man . . . that American." Dorticos was referring to Oswald.

The two CIA reports total four pages and Mann's telegram is three pages long. These three and other

documents were made public last year through a CIA historical review program. But they will be included in the 800,000 or more pages of government documents concerning the Kennedy assassination that will be made available for public review Monday at the National Archives.

The massive disclosure, which involves material from the CIA, FBI, State Department, Defense Depart-

ment, presidential libraries, the Warren Commission, the 1975 Rockefeller Commission and congressional panels such as the House Select Committee on Assassinations, comes in response to legislation passed almost a year ago.

The JFK Assassination Records Collection Act of 1992 called for the disclosure of virtually all the government's files relevant to the investigation of the assassination in Dallas almost 30 years ago. The law, which was passed in response to the continued controversy over the assassination, exempts from immediate disclosure records that would identify "an intelligence agent whose identity currently requires protection" or "confidential sources who would face 'substantial risk of harm' if identified."

A CIA spokesman said yesterday that 125,000 pages of agency material would be released to the archives and 10,000 pages retained under that provision.

Withheld documents must be described to the archives by the agency holding them and are subject to review by a five-member presidential panel that could compel their disclosure. When President George Bush

signed the law he said he objected to giving authority to the panel to override what he described as his constitutional authority to keep secret "executive branch deliberations." Bush refused to name individuals to the review panel, and President Clinton has ignored the law's provision that required nominations by Jan. 25.

Archives officials are preparing for an onslaught of reporters and Kennedy assassination buffs who have been waiting decades for access in one place to JFK records not previously made public.

One problem for specialists is that there will be no easy way to tell what has or has not been released previously. Through voluntary disclosure as well as Freedom of Information Act requests and court cases, hundreds of thousands of pages have been released over the years since the assassination.

For example, the Nov. 26 and 27, 1963, CIA reports on the intercepted Cuban phone conversations and Mann's views were among 12,000 pages of material released to the archives under the CIA's historical review program and made public with no fanfare last year. As a result, few reporters or Kennedy assassi-

nation researchers had reviewed those documents, archives officials said last week.

Those three documents, located in different boxes of CIA archival material, were among several hundred in last year's release that for the first time described specific details of the CIA's post-assassination investigation of Oswald's trip to Mexico City less than two months before he shot Kennedy.

Oswald arrived in Mexico City on Sept. 27, 1963, and made several visits to the Cuban and Soviet consulates there over the next few days, seeking visas to Cuba and the Soviet Union, according to records previously made public.

Chief among those he spoke to on several occasions was Silvia Duran, a Mexican citizen who worked at the Cuban Consulate. Duran called the Soviet Embassy on two occasions to discuss Oswald's visa request. Oswald himself called the Soviet Embassy on Oct. 1, 1963. Those calls were recorded by intelligence agents in Mexico City and, the day after Oswald was identified as the possible assassin, reported to Washington.

Although Oswald's discussions with Duran and his phone call to the Soviet Embassy have been known since the days of the Warren Commission, the CIA materials released last year provide a transcript of these calls.

The documents also show that immediately after Oswald was identified as the possible assassin, a CIA official in Mexico City recommended "the girl who put [Lee Harvey] Oswald in touch with the Soviet Embassy . . . be arrested as soon as possible by Mexican" police for questioning. The Mexicans were not to let anyone know about their action or that the United States was behind it.

The documents also show that on that same day the CIA told the FBI that the Soviet consular officer who had spoken to Oswald in Mexico City in late September was "an identified KGB [Soviet intelligence] officer" associated with the group "responsible for sabotage and assassination."

Following that disclosure, CIA officials immediately launched a broad investigation of the KGB officer, Valeriy Kostikov, and other KGB agents at the embassy in Mexico City. The next day, CIA headquarters was told by the Mexico City station that "Kostikov under Mexican secret service physical surveillance." As a result, Mexico City reported, CIA's own surveillance apparently was canceled.

See ARCHIVES, A5, Col. 1

Files Being Disclosed Under 1992 Law

ARCHIVES, From A4

Duran was questioned for three days and released. Transcripts of her interrogation were turned over to the CIA in Mexico City and cabled to Washington.

The Nov. 26 conversation between Dorticos and Hernandez Armas drew White House attention because in it Hernandez Armas reported to Dorticos about what had happened to Duran during her questioning.

Dorticos particularly wanted to know if "Duran had been asked anything about 'money' by the Mexican authorities." He was told that Duran told the Mexicans that Oswald wanted a visa, filled out forms, but the Havana government's response was "negative."

Hernandez Armas also told Dorticos that Duran was asked if she knew "this individual," meaning Oswald, and "if she had personal relations and even intimate relations with him," which Duran denied.

In closing the phone call, the CIA report says, "Dorticos again asked if Duran had been questioned about 'money.' Hernandez said no."

Nonetheless, Mann, the U.S. ambassador, told Washington he believed "that Dorticos' preoccupation

with the money angle of interrogation of Silvia Duran" corroborated "the strong possibility that a down payment was made to Oswald in the Cuban Embassy here, presumably with promise of a subsequent payment after assassination."

A CIA spokesman said 125,000 pages of agency material would be released.

Additional investigation reflected in several hundred more CIA documents, including another intercepted phone call between Dorticos and Hernandez Armas, convinced Washington that the original questions about "money" were related to fear that such a story was being "planted" to involve the Cubans with Oswald when there was no such relationship. But Mann continued to press for investigation of a possible Cuban connection.

The Warren Commission, which had access to these CIA documents, found in 1964 that Oswald acted alone in assassinating Kennedy and did not implicate any foreign power in the assassination.

Surveillance of Kostikov, according to subsequent CIA documents, failed to indicate he had a relationship to the assassination. Kostikov and two other former KGB agents who then served in Mexico City are trying to sell their stories to U.S. television networks and publishers.

Staff writer George Lardner Jr. contributed to this report.

THE KENNEDY FILES

From a formerly classified CIA message sent Nov. 26, 1963, to the White House and the FBI, raising the possibility of a Cuban connection to Lee Harvey Oswald.

16 May 63 23 56 Z

1. FOLLOWING IS ACCOUNT OF EXAMINATION CONFIRMATION INTERVIEW GENERAL PRESIDENT OSWALDO DOMINGUEZ DE MATEA, AND PROSECUTOR GENERAL ARMA, CUBAN AMBASSADOR TO MEXICO IN MEXICO CITY AT 0910 HOURS MEXICO CITY TIME ON 26 NOVEMBER 1963 AS REPORTED FROM SENSITIVE SOURCE.

3. DOMINGUEZ PARTICULARLY WANTED TO KNOW IF KUBAN HAD BEEN ASKED ANYTHING ABOUT "JOEY" BY THE MEXICAN AUTHORITIES.

KUBAN HAD BEEN ASKED IN INTERVIEW BY MEXICAN AUTHORITIES IF SHE KNEW "THIS INDIVIDUAL" (OSWALD) AND IF SHE HAD PERSONAL RELATIONS AND EVEN INTIMATE RELATIONS WITH HIM. KUBAN DENIED.